ART AND LIFE

By VERNON LEE

Roycroft Presses 7

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2010

http://www.archive.org/details/artlife00leev

THIS IS THE ESSAY ON ART AND LIFE
AS WRITTEN BY VERNON LEE AND
DONE INTO A BOOK AT THE ROY-
CROFT PRINTING SHOP THAT IS IN
EAST AURORA, NEW YORK, U. S. A.
MDCCCXCVI

Of this edition but Three Hundred and Fifty-two Copies were printed and types distributed ☘ Each copy is numbered and signed and this book is number 261

Art and Life

ONE afternoon, in Rome, on the way back from the Aventine, the road-mender climbed on to the tram as it moved slowly along, and fastened on to its front, alongside of the driver, a big bough of budding bay. Might one not search long for a better symbol of what we may all do by our life? Bleakness, wind, squalid streets, a car full of heterogeneous people, some very dull, most very common; a laborious jogtrot all the way. But to redeem it all with the pleasantness of beauty and the charm of significance, this laurel branch ☘

Our language does not possess any single word wherewith to sum up the various categories of things which minister to our organic and many sided æsthetic instincts, the things which affect us in that absolutely special, unmistakable, and hitherto mysterious manner expressed in the fact of our finding them beautiful. It is of the part which such things —whether actually present or merely shadowed in our mind—can play in our life, of the influence of the instinct for beauty on the other instincts making up our nature, that I wish to speak in these pages. And for this reason I have been glad to accept from the hands of chance, and of that road-mender of the tramway, the bay laurel as a symbol of

what we have no word to express—the aggregate of all art, all poetry, and particularly of all poetic and artistic vision and emotion.

OR the bay laurel happens not merely to be the evergreen, unfading plant into which Apollo metamorphosed, while pursuing the maiden whom he loved, even as the poet, the artist, turns into immortal shapes his own quite personal and transitory moods; it is a plant of noblest utility, averting, as the ancients thought, lightning from the dwellings it surrounded, even as disinterested love for beauty averts from our minds the dangers which fall on the vain and the covetous; and curing many aches and fevers, even as the contemplation of beauty refreshes and invigorates our spirit.

The symbol is too perfect to require any commentary. Let me therefore pass on to explain why the Beautiful should possess such power for good, and to point out before entering into a detailed account of any of them in especial what the three principal moral functions of æsthetic emotion and contemplation may be said to be. And, first, for the why. Beauty, save by a metaphorical application of the word, is not in the least the same thing as goodness, any more than beauty (despite

Keats's famous assertion) is the same thing as truth. These three objects of the soul's eternal pursuit have different objects, different laws, and fundamentally different origins. But the energies which express themselves in their pursuit—energies vital, primordial, and necessary even to man's physical survival—have all been evolved under the same stress of adaptation of the human creature to its surroundings; and have therefore, in their beginnings and in their ceaseless growth, been perpetually working in concert, meeting, crossing, and strengthening one another, until they have become indissolubly woven together by a number of great and organic coincidences.

IT IS these coincidences which all higher philosophy, from Plato downward, has forever strained to expound; these coincidences, which all religion and all poetry have taken for granted; and to three of which I desire to call attention, persuaded as I am that the scientific progress of our day will make short work of all the spurious æstheticism and all the short-sighted utilitarianism which have cast doubts upon the intimate and vital connection between beauty and every other noble object of our living. The three coincidences I have chosen are: that between development of the

æsthetic faculties and the development of the altruistic instincts; that between development of a sense of æsthetic harmony and a sense of the higher harmonies of universal life; and, before everything else, the coincidence between the preference for æsthetic pleasures and nobler growth of the individual.

THE particular emotion produced in us by such things as are beautiful, works of art or of nature, recollections and thoughts as well as sights and sounds, the emotion of æsthetic pleasure has been recognized ever since the beginning of time as of a mysteriously ennobling quality. All philosophers, beginning with Plato, have told us that; and the religious instinct of all mankind has practically proclaimed it, by employing for the worship of the highest powers, nay, by employing for the mere designation of the godhead, beautiful sights and sounds, and words by which beautiful sights and sounds are suggested. Nay, there has always lurked in men's minds, and expressed itself in the metaphors of men's speech—an intuition that the Beautiful is in some manner one of the primordial and, so to speak, cosmic powers of the world. The theories of various schools of mental science, and the practice of various schools of art, the practice particularly of the persons styled by themselves æsthetes and by others decadents, have indeed attempted to reduce man's relations with the great world-power Beauty to mere intellectual dilettantism or sensual superfineness. But the general intuition has not been shaken—the general intuition which felt in Beauty a superhuman, and, in that

sense, a truly divine power. And now it must become evident that the methods of modern psychology, of the great new science of body and soul, are beginning to explain the reasonableness of this intuition, or, at all events, to show very plainly in what direction we must look for the explanation thereof. This much can now be asserted, and can be indicated even to those least versed in recent psychological study, to wit, that the power of Beauty, the essential power therefore of art, is due to the relations of certain visible and audible forms with the chief nervous and vital functions of all sensitive creatures; relations established throughout the whole process of human and, perhaps, even of animal evolution; relations seated in the depths of our activities, but radiating upward even like our vague, organic sense of comfort and discomfort; and permeating even like our obscure relations with atmospheric conditions, into our highest and clearest consciousness, coloring and altering the whole groundwork of our thoughts and feelings. Such is the primordial and, in a sense, cosmic power of the Beautiful; a power whose very growth, whose constantly more complex nature proclaims its necessary and beneficial action in human evolution. It is the power of making human beings live, for the

moment, in a more organical vigorous and harmonious fashion, as mountain air or sea-wind makes them live, but with the difference that it is not merely the bodily, but very essentially the spiritual life, the life of thought and emotion, which is thus raised to unusual harmony and vigor ❧ I may illustrate the matter by a very individual instance, which will bring to the memory of each of my readers the vivifying power of some beautiful sight or sound or beautiful description. I was seated working by my window, depressed by the London outlook of narrow gray sky, endless gray roofs, and rusty elm-tops, when I became conscious of a certain increase of vitality, almost as if I had drunk a glass of wine, because a band somewhere or other had begun to play ❧ Suddenly, after various indifferent pieces, it began a certain piece, by Handel or in Handel's style, of which I have never known the name, but which I have always called for myself the Te Deum tune. And then it seemed as if my soul, and according to the sensations, in a certain degree my body even, were caught up on those notes, and were striking out as if swimming in a great breezy sea; or as if it had put forth wings and risen into a great free space of air. And, noticing my feelings, I seemed to be conscious that these notes were being played

on me, my fibres becoming the strings, so that as the notes moved and soared and swelled and radiated like stars and suns, I also being identified with sound, having become apparently the sound itself, must needs move and soar with them.

E CAN all recollect a dozen or more instances in which architecture, music, painting, or some sudden sight of sea or mountain, has thus affected us; and all poetry, particularly all great lyric poetry—Goethe's, Schiller's, Wordsworth's, and, above all, Browning's—is full of the record of such experience

I have said that the difference between this æsthetic heightening of our vitality and such heightening of vitality as we experience from going into fresh air and sunshine or taking fortifying food—the difference between the æsthetic and the mere physiological pleasurable excitement consists herein, that in the case of an impression, not of bodily comfort but of beauty, it is not merely our physical life but our spiritual life which is suddenly rendered more vigorous. We do not merely breathe better and digest better, though that is no small gain, but we seem to know better; under the vitalizing touch of the Beautiful, our consciousness seems filled with the affirmation of what life is, what is worth being, what among our many thoughts and acts and feelings are real and organic and important, what among the many possible moods

Art and Life

is the real, eternal ourself ❧ Such are the great forces of Nature gathered up in what we call the æsthetic phenomenon; and it is these forces of Nature which, stolen from heaven by the man of genius or the nation of genius, and welded together in music or architecture, in visual art or written, give to the great work of art its power to quicken the life of the soul.

Art and Life

I HOPE I have been able to indicate how, by its essential nature, by the primordial power it embodies, all Beauty, and particularly Beauty in art, tends to fortify and refine the spiritual life of the individual. But this is only half of the question, for, in order to get the full benefit of beautiful things and beautiful thoughts, in order to obtain in the highest degree those potent æsthetic emotions, the individual must undergo a course of self-training, of self-initiation, which in its turn elicits and improves some of the highest qualities of his soul. Nay, in all true æsthetic training there must needs be—as every great writer on art has felt, from Plato to Ruskin, but none has expressed so clearly as Mr. Pater—into all æsthetic training there must needs enter an ethical, almost an ascetic element.

THE greatest art bestows pleasure just in proportion as people are capable of buying that pleasure at the price of attention, intelligence, and reverent sympathy. For great art is such as is richly endowed, full of variety, subtlety, and suggestiveness; full of delightfulness enough for a lifetime, the lifetime of generations and generations of men; great art is to its true lovers like Cleopatra to Antony—"age cannot wither it, nor custom stale its

infinite variety." Nay, when it is the greatest art of all, the art produced by the marvelous artist, the most gifted race, and the longest centuries, we find ourselves in presence of something which, like Nature itself, contains more beauty, incorporates more thought, and works more miracles than most of us have faculties to fully appreciate. So that, in some of Titian's pictures and Michael Angelo's frescoes, the Olympia Hermes, certain cantos of Dante and plays of Shakespeare, fugues of Bach and scenes of Mozart, we can each of us, looking our closest, feeling our uttermost, see and feel perhaps but a trifling portion of what there is to be seen and felt, leaving other sides, other perfections, to be appreciated by our neighbors; till it comes to pass that we find different persons very differently delighted by the same masterpiece, and accounting most discrepantly for their delight in it.

NOW such pleasure as this requires not merely a vast amount of activity on our part, since all pleasure, even the lowest, is the expression of an activity; it requires a vast amount of attention, of intelligence, of what, in races or in individuals, means special training. There is a sad confusion in men's minds on the very essential subject of

pleasure. We tend, most of us, to oppose the idea of pleasure to the idea of work, effort, strenuousness, patience; and, therefore, recognize as pleasures only those which cost none of these things, or as little as possible, pleasures which, instead of being produced through our will and act, impose themselves upon us from the outside.

Art and Life

IN ALL art—for art stands half way between the sensual and emotional experiences and the experiences of the mere reasoning intellect—in all art there is necessarily an element which thus imposes itself upon us from without, an element which takes and catches us; color, strangeness of outline, sentimental or terrible quality, rhythm, modulation or clang which tickles the ear. But the art which thus takes and catches our attention the most easily, asking nothing in return, or next to nothing, is also the poorest art—the oleograph, the pretty woman in the fashion plate, the caricature, the representation of some domestic or harrowing scene, children being put to bed, babes in the wood, railway accidents, etc.; or again, dance or march music, and aphorisms in verse. It catches your attention, instead of your attention catching it; but it speedily ceases to interest, gives you nothing more, cloys, or comes to a dead stop. It resembles thus far mere sensual pleasures—a savory dish, a glass of good wine, an excellent cigar, a warm bed, which impose themselves on the nerves without expenditure of attention; with the result, of course, that little or nothing remains, a sensual impression dying, so to speak, childless, a barren, disconnected thing, without place in the

memory, unmarried as it is to the memory's clients, thought and human feeling.

Art and Life

IF SO many people prefer poor art to great, 'tis because they refuse to give, through inability or unwillingness, as much of their soul as great art requires for its enjoyment. And it is noticeable that busy men, coming to art for pleasure when they are too weary for attention or thought, so often prefer the sensation novel, the music-hall song, and such painting as is but a costlier kind of oleograph ; treating all other art as a humbug, and art in general as a trifle wherewith to while away a lazy moment, a trifle about which every man can know what he likes best

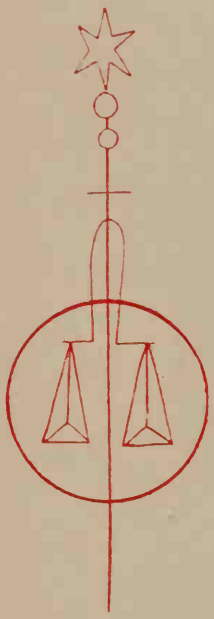
Thus it is that great art makes, by coincidence, the same demands as noble thinking and acting. For, even as all noble sports develop muscle, develop eye, skill, quickness and pluck in bodily movement, qualities which are valuable also in the practical business of life ; so also the appreciation of noble kinds of art implies the acquisition of habits of accuracy, of patience, of respectfulness and suspension of judgment, of preference of future good over present, of harmony and clearness, of sympathy, and kindly fairness, which are all of them useful to our neighbors and ourselves in the many contingencies and

obscurities of real life ☘ Now this is not so with the pleasures of the senses; the pleasures of the senses do not increase by sharing, and sometimes cannot be shared at all; they are, moreover, evanescent, leaving us no richer; above all, they cultivate in ourselves qualities useful only for that particular enjoyment. Thus, a highly discriminating palate may have saved the life of animals and savages, but what can its subtleness do nowadays beyond making us into gormandizers and winebibbers, or, at best, into cooks and tasters for the service of gormandizing and winebibbing persons?

Art and Life

DELIGHT in beautiful things and in beautiful thoughts requires, therefore, a considerable exercise of the will and the attention, such as is not demanded by our lower enjoyments. Indeed, it is probably this absence of moral and intellectual effort which recommends such lower kinds of pleasure to a large number of persons. I have said lower kinds of pleasure, because there are other enjoyments beside those of the senses which entail no moral improvement in ourselves: the enjoyments connected with vanity. Even if any of us could be sure of being impeccable on these points, we should not be too hard on the persons and the classes of persons who are conscious of no other kind of enjoyment. They are not necessarily base, not necessarily sensual or vain, because they care only for bodily indulgence, for notice and gain. They are very likely not base, but only apathetic, slothful, or very tired ❧ The noble sport, the intellectual problem, the great work of art, the divinely beautiful effect in Nature, require that one should give one's self; the French-cooked dinner as much as the pot of beer; the game of chance, whether with clean cards at a club or with greasy ones in a taproom; the outdoing of one's neigh-

bors, whether by the out-at-elbows heroes of Zola or the polished heroes of Balzac require no such coming forward of the soul: they take us, without any need for our giving ourselves. Hence, as I have just said, the preference for them does not imply original baseness, but only lack of higher energy. We can judge of the condition of those who can taste no other pleasures by remembering what the best of us are when we are tired or ill: vaguely craving for interests, sensations, emotions, variety, but quite unable to procure them through our own effort, and longing for them to come to us from without.



NOW, in our still very badly organized world, an enormous number of people are condemned by the tyranny of poverty or the tyranny of fashion, to be, when the day's work or the day's business is done, in just such a condition of fatigue and languor, of craving, therefore, for the baser kinds of pleasure. We all recognize that this is the case with what we call poor people, and that this is why poor people are apt to prefer the public-house to the picture-gallery or the concert-room. It would be greatly to the purpose were we to acknowledge that it is largely the case with the rich, and that for that reason the rich are apt to take more pleasure in ostentatious dis-

play of their properties than in contemplation of such beauty as is accessible to all men. Indeed, it is one of the ironies of the barbarous condition we are pleased to call civilization, that so many rich men—thousands daily—are systematically toiling and moiling till they are unable to enjoy any pleasure which requires vigor of mind and attention, rendering themselves impotent from sheer fatigue, to enjoy the delights which life gives generously to all those who fervently seek them ❧ And what for? Largely for the sake of those pleasures which can be had only for money, but which can be enjoyed without using one's soul.

THUS it is that real æsthetic keenness—and æsthetic keenness, as I shall show hereafter, means appreciating beauty, not collecting beautiful properties—means development of the qualities of patience, attention, reverence, and of that vigor of soul which is not called forth, but rather impaired, by the coarser enjoyments of the senses and of vanity. So far, therefore, we have seen that the capacity for æsthetic pleasure presupposes a certain nobility in the individual. I think I can show that the preference for æsthetic pleasure implies also a happier relation between the individual and his fellows.

But the cultivation of our æsthetic pleasures does not merely necessitate our improvement in certain very essential moral qualities. It tends, as much, in a way, as the cultivation of the intellect and the sympathies, to make us live chiefly in the spirit; in which alone, as philosophers and mystics have rightly understood, there is safety from the worst miseries and room for the most complete happiness. Only, we shall learn from the study of our æsthetic pleasures that while the stoics and mystics have been right in affirming that the spirit only can give the highest good, they have been fatally wrong in the reason for their preference. And we may learn from our

æsthetic experiences that the spirit is useful, not in detaching us from the enjoyable things of life, but, on the contrary, in giving us their consummate possession. The spirit—one of whose most precious capacities is that it enables us to print off all outside things on to ourselves, to store moods and emotions, to recombine and reinforce past impressions into present ones—the spirit puts pleasure more into our own keeping, making it more independent of time and place, of circumstances, and, what is equally important, independent of other people's strivings after pleasure, by which our own, while they clash and hamper, are so often fatally impeded.

FOR OUR intimate commerce with beautiful things and beautiful thoughts does not exist only, or even chiefly, at the moment of seeing, or hearing, or reading; nay, if the beautiful touched us only at such separate and special moments, the beautiful would play but an insignificant part in our existence

As a fact, those moments represent very often only the act of storage, or not much more. Our real æsthetic life is in ourselves, often isolated from the beautiful words, objects, or sounds; sometimes almost unconscious; permeating the whole of the rest of

life in certain highly æsthetic individuals, and, however mixed with other activities, as constant as the life of the intellect and sympathies; nay, as constant as the life of assimilation and motion. We can live off a beautiful object, we can live by its means, even when its visible or audible image is partially, nay, sometimes wholly, obliterated; for the emotional condition can survive the image and be awakened at the mere name, awakened sufficiently to heighten the emotion caused by other images of beauty. We can sometimes feel, so to speak, the spiritual companionship and comfort of a work of art, or of a scene in Nature, nay, almost its particular caress to our whole being, when the work of art or the scene has grown faint in our memory, but the emotion it awakened has kept warm.

THIS possibility of storing for later use, of increasing by combination, the impressions of beautiful things, makes art—and by art I mean all æsthetic activity, whether in the professed artist who creates or the unconscious artist who assimilates—the type of such pleasures as are within our own keeping, and makes the æsthetic life typical also of that life of the spirit in which alone we can realize any kind of human freedom. We shall all of us meet

with examples thereof if we seek through our consciousness. That such things existed was made clear to me during a weary period of illness, for which I shall always be grateful, since it taught me, in those months of incapacity for enjoyment, that there is a safe kind of pleasure, a pleasure we can defer. I spent part of that time at Tangier, surrounded by all things which could delight me, but in none of which I took any real delight. I did not enjoy Tangier at the time, but I have enjoyed Tangier ever since, on the principle of the bee eating its honey months after making it. The reality of Tangier, I mean the reality of my presence there, and the state of my nerves, were not in the relation of enjoyment; but the image of Tangier, the remembrance of what I saw and did there, has often since been with my eye in the relation of the greatest enjoyment.

After all, is it not often the case with pictures, statues, journeys, and the reading of books? The weariness entailed, the mere continuity of looking or attending, quite apart from tiresome accompanying circumstances, make the apparently real act, what we expect to be the act of enjoyment, quite illusory; like Coleridge, we see, not feel, how beautiful things are. Later on, all odious accompanying circumstances are utterly forgotten, eliminated,

and the weariness is gone: we enjoy not merely unhampered by accidents, but in the very way our heart desires. For we can choose—our mood unconsciously does it for us—the right moment and right accessories for consuming some of our stored delights; moreover, we can add what condiments and make what mixtures suit us best at that moment.

WE DRAW not merely upon one past reality, making its essentials present, but upon dozens. To revert to Tangier (whose experience first brought these possibilities clearly before me), I find I enjoy it in connection with Venice, the mixture having a special roundness of tone or flavor. Similarly, I once heard Bach's Magnificat, with St. Mark's of Venice as a background in my imagination; certain moonlight songs of Schumann have blended wonderfully with remembrances of old Italian villas & King Solomon, in all his ships, could not have carried the things which I can draw, in less than a second, from one tiny convolution of my brain, from one corner of my mind; no Faust that ever lived had spells which could evoke such kingdoms and worlds as any one of us can conjure up with certain words: Greece, the Middle Ages, Orpheus, Robin Hood, Mary Stuart, Ancient Rome, the Far East

And here, as fit illustration of these benificent powers, which can free us from a life where we are stifled and raise us into a life where we can breathe and grow, let me record my gratitude to a certain young goat, which, on one occasion, turned what might have been a detestable hour into a pleasant one. The goat, or rather kid, a charming ga-

zelle-like creature, with budding horns and broad, hard forehead, was one of my fourteen fellow-passengers in a third-class carriage on a certain bank holiday Saturday. Riding and standing in such crowded misery had cast a general gloom over all the holiday-makers; they seem to have forgotten to-morrow's outing in sullen hatred of all their neighbors; and I confess that I too began to wonder whether bank holiday was an altogether delightful institution. But the goat had no such doubts. Leaning against the boy who was taking it holiday-making, it tried very gently to climb and butt, and to play with its sulky fellow-travellers. And as it did so it seemed to radiate a sort of poetry on everything; vague impressions of rocks, woods, hedges, the Alps, Italy and Greece; mythology, of course, and that amusement of "jouer avec des chevres apprivoisees," which that great charmer M. Renan has attributed to his charming Greek people. And, as I realized the joy of the goat on finding itself among the beech woods and short grass of the Hertfordshire hills, I began also to see my other fellow-travellers no longer as surly people resenting each other's presence, but as happy human beings admitted once more to the pleasant things of life: the goat had quite put me in concert with bank holiday When it got out of the train at

Berkhamstead, the emptier carriage seemed suddenly more crowded, and my fellow-travellers more contented; but I remained quite pleased, and when I had alighted, found that instead of a horrible journey, I could remember only a rather charming little adventure. That beneficent goat had acted as Pegasus; and on its small back my spirit had ridden off to the places it loves. In this fashion does the true æsthete tend to prefer, even like the austerest moralist, the delights which, being of the spirit, are most independent of circumstances and most in the individual's own power.

THE habit of æsthetic enjoyment makes this epicurean into an ascetic. He builds as little as possible on the things of the senses and the moment, knowing how little, in comparison, we have either in our power. For, even if the desired object, person or circumstance comes, how often does it not come in the wrong hour! In this world, which mankind still fits so badly, the wish and the realization are rarely in unison, rarely in harmony, but follow each other, most often, like vibrations of different instruments, at intervals which can only jar. The n'est-ce que cela, the inability to enjoy, of successful ambition and favored passionate love is famous; and short of love even and ambition, we all know the flatness of much-desired pleasures ✂ King Solomon, who had not been enough of an ascetic, as we all know, and therefore tapered off in cynicism, had learned that there is not only satiety as a result of enjoyment, but a sort of satiety also, an absence of keenness, an incapacity of caring, due to the deferring of enjoyment. He doubtless knew, among other items of vanity, that our wishes are often fulfilled without our knowing it, so indifferent have we become through long waiting, or so changed in our wants

In a similar way, the modest certainty of all

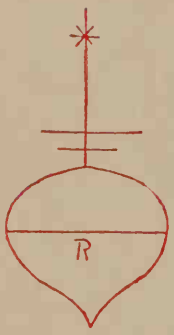
pleasure derived from the Beautiful will accustom the perfect æsthete to seek for the like in other branches of activity. Accustomed to the happiness which is in his own keeping, he will view with suspicion all craving for satisfactions which are beyond his control; he will not ask to be given the moon, and he will not even wish to be given it, lest the wish should grow into a want; he will make the best of candles and glowworms and of distant heavenly luminaries: moreover, being accustomed to enjoy the mere sight of things as much as other folk do their possession, he will probably actually prefer that the moon should be hanging in the heavens, and not on his staircase.

AGAIN, having experience of the æsthetic pleasures which involve, in their sober waking bliss, no wear and tear, no reaction of satiety, he will not care much for the more rapturous pleasures of passion and success, which always cost as much as they are worth. He will be unwilling to run into such debt with his own feelings, having learned from æsthetic pleasure that there are modes of soul which, instead of impoverishing, enrich it. Thus does the commerce with beautiful things and beautiful thoughts tend to develop in us that healthy amount of asceticism which

is necessary for every workable scheme tending to the benefit of the individual and the plurality: self-restraint, choice of aims, consistent and thorough-paced subordination of the lesser interest to the greater; above all, what sums up asceticism as an efficacious means toward happiness, preference of the spiritual, the unconditional, the durable, to the temporal, the uncertain, and the fleeting.

THE intimate and continuous intercourse with the Beautiful teaches us, therefore, the renunciation of the unnecessary for the sake of the possible; it teaches asceticism leading not to indifference and Nirvana, but to higher complexities of vitalization, to a more complete and harmonious rhythm of individual existence

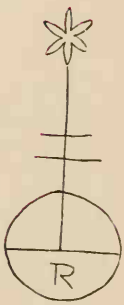
In such manner, to resume our symbol of the bay laurel which the road-mender stuck on to the front of that tramcar, can our love for the Beautiful avert, like the plant of Apollo, many of the storms and cure many of the fevers of life.



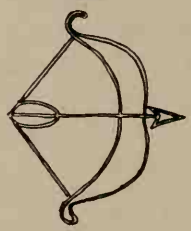
Art and Life

I AM desirous of beginning this chapter, in which I propose to show how a genuine æsthetic development tends to render the individual more useful, or at least less harmful, to his fellow-men —I am desirous of beginning this chapter also with a symbol, such as may sum up my meaning, and point it out in the process of my expounding it. The symbol is contained in the saying of the Abbot Joachim of Floro, one of the great precursers of St. Francis, to wit: "He that is a true monk considers nothing as belonging to him except a lyre—nihil reputit esse suum nisi citharam." Yes; nothing except a lyre

But that lyre, our only real possession, is our soul. It must be shaped, and strung, and carefully kept in tune, no easy matter in surroundings little suited to delicate instruments and delicate music. Possessing it, we possess, in the only true sense of possession, the whole world For going along our way, whether rough or even, there are formed within us, singing the beauty and wonder of the world, mysterious sequences and harmonies of notes, new every time, answering to the primæval everlasting affinities between ourselves and all things; our souls becoming musical under the touch of the universe Let us bear this in mind, this symbol of the



lyre which Abbot Joachim allowed as sole property to the man of spiritual life ; and let us remember that, as I tried to show in my previous chapter, the true lover of the Beautiful, active, self-restrained, and indifferent to lower pleasures and interests, is your man of true spiritual life in one sense. For the symbol of Abbot Joachim's lyre will make it easier to follow my meaning, and easier to forestall it, while I try to convince you that art, and all æsthetic activity, is important as a type of the only kind of pleasure which reasonable beings should admit of, the kind of pleasure which tends not to diminish by wastefulness and exclusive appropriation, but to increase by sympathy the possible pleasures of other persons.



NOW, it so happens that many of the pleasures which we allow ourselves—pleasures which all the world admits our right to—are pleasures which waste wealth and time, make light of the advantage of others, and light of the good of our souls. This fact does not imply either original sinfulness or degeneracy—religious and scientific terms for the same thing—in poor mankind ☙ It merely means that we are all of us as yet very undeveloped creatures; the majority moreover, less developed than the minority, and the bulk of each individual's nature very much in the rear of his own aspirations and definitions. Mankind, in the process of adapting itself to external circumstances, has per force evolved a certain amount of intellectual and moral quality; but that intellectual and moral quality, is, so far, merely a means for rendering material existence endurable; it will have to become itself the origin and aim of what we must call a spiritual side of life. In the meanwhile, human beings do not get any large proportion of their enjoyment from what they admit to be their nobler side ☙

Hence it is that even when you have got rid of the mere struggle for existence—fed, clothed, and housed your civilized savage, and secured food, clothes, and shelter for his

brood, you have by no means provided against his destructive, pain-giving activities ❧ He has spare time and energy; and these he will devote, ten to one, to recreations involving, at the best, the slaughter of harmless creatures; at the worst, to the wasting of valuable substance, of what might be other people's food; or else to the hurting of other people's feelings in various games of chance or skill, particularly in the great skilled game of brag called social life.

UR gentlemanly ancestors, indeed, could not amuse themselves without emptying a certain number of bottles and passing some hours under the table; while our nimble-witted French neighbors, we are told, included in their expenditure on convivial amusements a curious item called la casse, to wit, the smashing of plates and glasses. The Spaniards, on the other hand, have bull-fights, most shocking spectacles as we know, for we make it a point to witness them when we are over there ❧

Undoubtedly we have immensely improved on all this, but we are susceptible of a great deal of further improvement. Most people are safe only when at work, and become mischievous when they begin to play. They do

not know how to kill time (for that is the way in which we poor mortals regard life) without incidentally killing something else: proximately themselves, birds and beast, and their neighbors' good fame; more remotely, but as surely, the constitution of their descendants, and the possible wages of the working classes. It is quite marvelous how little aptness there is in the existing human being for taking pleasure either in what already exists ready to hand, or in the making of something which had better be there; in what can be enjoyed without diminishing the enjoyment of others, as nature, books, art, thought, and the better qualities of one's neighbors.

IN FACT, one reason why there is something so morally pleasant in cricket and football and rowing and riding and dancing, is surely that they furnish on the physical plane the counterpart of what is so sadly lacking on the spiritual—amusements which do good to the individual and no harm to his fellows ❧ Of course, in our state neither of original sinfulness nor of degeneracy, but of very imperfect development, it is still useless and absurd to tell people to make use of intellectual and moral resources which they have not yet got. It is as vain to preach to the majority of the well-to-do the duty of abstinence from waste-

fulness, rivalry, and ostentation as it is vain to preach to the majority of the badly-off abstinence from alcohol; without such pleasures their life would be unendurably insipid. But inevitable as is such evil in the present, it inevitably brings its contingent of wretchedness; and it is therefore the business of all such as could become the forerunners of a better state of things to refuse to follow the lead of their inferiors. Exactly because the majority is still so hopelessly wasteful and mischievous, does it behoove the minority not merely to work to some profit, but to play without damage. To do this should become the mark of Nature's aristocracy, a sign of liberality of spiritual birth and breeding, a question of noblesse oblige.

AND here comes in the immense importance of art—and by art I mean æsthetic appreciation even more than æsthetic creation; I mean the extracting and combining of beauty in the mind of the obscure layman quite as much as the embodiment of such extracted and combined beauty in the visible or audible work of the great artist—and here comes in the immense importance of art as a type of pleasure. For experience of true æsthetic activity must teach us, in proportion as it is genuine and ample, that the enjoyment of the Beautiful is not merely independent of, but actually incompatible with, that tendency to buy our satisfaction at the expense of others which remains more or less in all of us as a survival from savagery ☘ The reasons why this mischievous tendency is combated by true æstheticism are both negative and positive, and may be roughly divided into three headings. Only one of them is generally admitted to exist, and of it, therefore, I shall speak very briefly: I mean the fact that the enjoyment of beautiful things is originally and intrinsically one of those which are heightened by sharing: we know it instinctively when, as children, we drag our comrades and elders to the window when a regiment passes or a circus parades by; we learn it more and

Art and Life

more as we advance in life, and find that we must get other people to see the pictures, to hear the music, to read the books which we admire. It is a case of what psychologists call the contagion of emotion, by which the feeling of one individual is strengthened by the expression of similar feelings in his neighbor, and is explicable, most likely, by the fact that the greatest effort is always required to overcome original inertness, and that two efforts, like two horses starting a carriage instead of one, combined give more than the value of each taken separately. The fact is so obvious that we need not discuss it any further, but merely hold it over to add, at last, to the result of the two other reasons, negative and positive, which tend to make æsthetic enjoyment the type of unselfish, nay, even of altruistic pleasure.

THE first of these reasons, the negative one, is that æsthetic pleasure is not in the least dependent upon the fact of personal ownership, and that it therefore affords an opportunity of leaving inactive, of condemning to atrophy by inactivity, the passion for exclusive possession, for individual advantage, which is at the bottom of all bad luxury, of all ostentation, and of nearly all rapacity. And here I would beg my reader to call to mind that curious

saying of Abbot Joachim's, and to consider that I wish to prove that, like his true monk, the true æsthete, who nowadays loves and praises creation much as the true monk did in former centuries, can really possess as sole personal possession only a musical instrument—to wit, his own well-strung and resonant soul. And now, as to luxury, by which I mean the possession of such things as minister only to weakness and vanity, the possession of such things as we cannot reasonably hope that all men may some day equally possess ❧ When we are young—and most of us remain mere withered children, never attaining maturity in such matters—we are usually attracted by luxury and luxurious living. We are possessed by that youthful instinct of union, fusion, marriage, so to speak, with what our soul desires; we hanker after close contact and complete possession; and we fancy, in our inexperience, that luxury, the accumulation of valuables, the appropriation of opportunities, the fact of rejecting from our life all that is not costly, brilliant, and dainty, implies such fusion of our soul with beauty.

BUT, as we reach maturity, we discover that this is all delusion. We learn, from the experience of the occasions when our souls have truly

possessed the Beautiful, or been possessed by it, that if such union with the harmony of outer things is rare, perhaps impossible, among squalor and weariness, it is difficult and anomalous in the condition which we entitle luxury. We learn that our assimilation of beauty, and that momentary renewal of our soul which it effects, rarely takes place in connection with our own ownership, but comes, taking us by surprise, in presence of hill, streams, memories of pictures, poets' words, and strains of music, which are not, and cannot be, our property.

THE essential character of beauty is its being, so to speak, a relation between ourselves and certain objects. The emotion to which we attach its name is produced, motived by something outside us, pictures, music, landscape, or whatever it may be; but the emotion resides in us, and it is the emotion, and not merely its object, which we desire ❧ Hence material possession has no æsthetic meaning. We possess a beautiful object with our soul; the possession thereof with our hands or our legal rights brings us no whit nearer the beauty. Ownership, in this sense, may empower us to smash the object and thus cheat others of the possession of its beauty, but does not help us to possess that beauty. It is with beauty as with that singer who answered Catherine II., "Your Majesty's policemen can make me scream, but they cannot make me sing;" and she might have added, for my parallel, "Your policemen, great Empress, even could they make me sing, would not be able to make you hear." ❧ Hence all strong æsthetic feeling will always prefer ownership of the mental image to ownership of the tangible object; and any desire for material appropriation or exclusive enjoyment will be merely so much weakening and

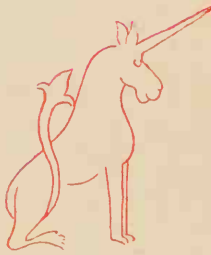
adulteration of the æsthetic sentiment. Since the mental image, the only thing æsthetically possessed, is in no way diminished or damaged by sharing; nay, by one of the most gracious coincidences between beauty and kindliness, the æsthetic emotion is even intensified by the knowledge of its co-existence in others; the delight in each person communicating itself, like a musical third, fifth, or octave, to the similar yet different delight in his neighbor, harmonic enriching harmonic by stimulating vibration.

IF, THEN, we wish to possess casts, copies, or photographs of certain works of art, this is æsthetically considered exactly as we wish to have the means—railway tickets, permission for galleries, and so forth—of seeing certain pictures or statues as often as we wish. For we feel that the images in our mind may require renewing, or that, in combination with other more recently acquired images, they will, if renewed, yield a new kind of delight. But this is quite another matter from wishing to own the material object, the thing we call work of art itself, forgetting that it is a work of art only for the soul capable of instating it as such

Thus, in every person who truly cares for beauty, there is a necessary tendency to re-

place the legal illusory act of owning by the real spiritual act of appreciation ❧ Charles Lamb already expressed this delightfully in the essay on the old manor-house ; compared with his possession of its beauties, its walk, tapestried walls and family portraits, nay, even of the ghosts of former proprietors, the possession by the legal owner was utterly nugatory.

I HAVE spoken of material, actual possession. But if we look closer at it we shall see that save with regard to the things which are actually consumed, destroyed, disintegrated, changed to something else in their enjoyment, the notion of ordinary possession is a mere delusion. It is obtainable only by a constant obtrusion of a mere idea, the idea of self, and of such unsatisfactory ideas as one's right, for instance, to exclude others. 'Tis like the tension of a muscle, the constant keeping the consciousness aware by repeating "Mine—mine—mine and not theirs ; not theirs, but mine." And this wearisome act of self-assertion leaves little power for appreciation, for the appreciation which others can have quite equally, and without which there is no reality at all in ownership ❧



Hence, the deeper our enjoyment of beauty, the freer shall we become of the dreadful de-

lusion of exclusive appropriation, despising such unreal possession in proportion as we have tasted the real one. We shall know the two kinds of ownership too well apart to let ourselves be cozened into cumbering our lives with material properties and their responsibilities. We shall save up our vigor, not for obtaining and keeping (think of the thousand efforts and cares of ownership, even the most negative) the things which yield happy impressions, but for receiving and storing up and making capital of those impressions. We shall seek to furnish our mind with beautiful thoughts, not our houses with pretty things.

I HOPE I have made it clear enough that æsthetic enjoyment is hostile to the unkind and wasteful pleasures of selfish indulgence and selfish appropriation, because the true possession of the beautiful things of Nature, of art, and of thought is spiritual, and neither damages, nor diminishes, nor hoards them, because the lover of the Beautiful seeks for beautiful impressions and remembrances, which are vested in his soul, and not in material objects. That is the negative benefit of the love of the Beautiful. Let us now proceed to the positive and active assistance which it renders, when genuine and thorough-paced, to such thought as we give to the happiness and dignity of others ❧ I have said that our pleasure in the Beautiful is essentially a spiritual phenomenon, one, I mean, which takes place in our own sensations and emotions, altering the contents of our mind, while leaving the beautiful object itself intact and unaltered. This being the case, it is easy to understand that our æsthetic pleasure will be complete and extensive in proportion to the amount of activity of our soul; for, remember, all pleasure is proportionate to activity, and, as I said before, great beauty does not merely take us, but we must give ourselves to it. Hence, an increase in the capacity for æsthetic pleasure

will mean an increase in a portion of our spiritual activity, a greater readiness to perceive small hints, to connect different items, to reject the lesser good for the greater. Moreover, a great, perhaps the greater, part of our æsthetic pleasure is due, as I also told you before, to the storing of impressions in our mind, and to the combining of them there with other impressions ❧

Indeed, it is for this reason that I have made no difference, save in amount, between æsthetic creation, so called, and æsthetic appreciation, insisting, on the contrary, that the artistic layman creates, produces something new and personal, only in a less degree than the professed artist. For the æsthetic life does not consist merely in the perception of the beautiful object, not merely in the emotion of that spiritual contact between the work of art or of Nature and the soul of the appreciator: it is continued in the emotions and images and thoughts which are awakened by that perception; and the æsthetic life is life, is something continuous and organic, just because new forms, however obscure and evanescent, are continually born, in their turn continually to give birth, of that marriage between the beautiful thing outside and the beautiful soul within ❧ Hence, the full æsthetic life consists in the creating and ex-

tending of ever new harmonies in the mind of the unconscious artist who merely enjoys, as a result of the creating and extending of new harmonies, not merely in the invisible mind, but in the visible work, of the conscious artist who creates. This being the case, the true æsthete is forever seeking to reduce his impressions and thoughts to harmony, and forever, accordingly, being pleased with some of them, and disgusted with others.

THE desire for beauty and harmony, in proportion as it becomes active and sensitive, explores into every detail, establishes comparisons between everything, judges, approves and disapproves, and makes terrible and wholesome havoc not merely in our surroundings, but in our habits and our lives. And very soon the mere thought of something ugly becomes enough to outweigh the actual presence of something beautiful. I was told last winter at San Remo that the scent of the Parma violet can be distilled only by the oil of the flower being passed through a layer of pork fat; and I confess that since that revelation violet essence has lost much of the charm it possessed for my mind: the thought of the lard counterbalanced the reality of the perfume

Now this violet essence thus obtained is symbolic of many of the apparently refined enjoy-

ments of our life. We shall find that luxury and pomp, delightful sometimes in themselves, are distilled through a layer of coarse and repulsive labor; and the thought of the pork suet will spoil the smell of the violets. For the more dishes we have for dinner, the greater number of cooking-pots will have to be cleaned; the more carriages and horses we use, the more washing and grooming will result; the more crowded our rooms with furniture and knickknacks, the more dust will have to be removed; the more numerous and delicate our clothes, the more brushing and folding there will be; and the more purely ornamental our own existence, the less ornamental will be that of others.

Art and Life

THERE is a saying of Pascal's to the effect that a fop carries on his person the evidence of the existence of many people devoted to his service. This thought is doubtless delightful to a fop; but it is not pleasant to an æsthete: for vanity takes pleasure in lack of harmony between one's self and one's neighbor, while æsthetic feeling takes pleasure only in harmonious relations. Now the thought of the servile lives devoted to make our life more beautiful counterbalances the pleasure of the beauty; 'tis the eternal question of the violet essence and the pork suet. But the habit of beauty, the æsthetic sense, becomes, as I said, more and more sensitive and vivacious; and the more wide awake it becomes, the more difficult it is to seclude it from the knowledge of every sort of detail, to prevent its noticing the ugly side, the ugly lining of certain pretty things. 'Tis a but weak and sleepy kind of æstheticism which "blinks and shuts its apprehension up" at your bidding, which looks another way discreetly, and discreetly refrains from all comparisons. The real æsthetic activity is an activity; it is one of the strongest and most imperious powers of the human nature, it does not take orders, it only gives them. It is, when full grown, a kind of conscience of beautiful and ugly, an-

alogous to the other conscience of right and wrong, and it is equally difficult to silence. If you can silence your æsthetic faculty and bid it be satisfied with the lesser beauty, the lesser harmony, instead of the greater, be sure that it is a very rudimentary kind of instinct, and that you are no more thoroughly æsthetic than you could be thoroughly moral, if you could make your sense of right and wrong be blind and dumb at your convenience. Hence, the more æsthetic we become, the less we shall tolerate such modes of living as involve dull and dirty work for others, as involve the exclusion of others from the sort of life which we consider æsthetically tolerable. We shall require such houses and such habits as can be seen, and, what is inevitable in all æsthetical development, as can also be thought of, in all their details; we shall require a homogeneous impression of decorum and fitness from the lives of others as well as from our own, from what we actually see and from what we merely know; for the imperious demand for beauty, for harmony will be applied no longer to our mere material properties, but to that other possession which is always with us and can never be taken from us, the images and feelings within our soul

Now, that other human beings should be

drudging sordidly in order that we may be idle and showy is a thought, a vision, an emotion which does not get on in our mind in company with the sight of sunset and sea, the taste of mountain air and woodland freshness, the faces and forms of Florentine saints and antique gods, the serene poignancy of grand phrases of music.

THIS feeling is increasing daily. Our deepest æsthetic emotions are, we are beginning to recognize, connected with things which we do not, cannot, possess in the vulgar sense. Nay, these deepest æsthetic emotions depend, to an appreciable degree, on the very knowledge that these things are either not such as money can purchase, or that they are within the purchasing power of all. The sense of being shareable by others, of being even shareable, as it were, by other kinds of utility, adds a very keen attraction to all beautiful things and beautiful actions, and, of course, vice versa. And things which are beautiful, but connected with luxury and exclusive possession, come to affect one as, so to speak, lacking harmonics, lacking those additional vibrations of pleasure which enrich impressions of beauty by impressions of utility and kindliness ☘ Thus, after enjoying the extraordinarily lovely

tints—oleander pink, cinder grey, and most delicate citron—of the plaster which covers the commonest cottages, the humblest chapels, all round Genoa, there is something short and acid in the pleasure one derives from equally charming colors in expensive dresses; similarly, in Italy, much of the charm of marble, of the sea-cave shimmer, of certain palace-yards and churches, is due to the knowledge that this lovely, noble substance is easy to cut and quarried in vast quantities hard by; no wretched rarity like sapphires and rubies, which diminish by the worth of a family's yearly keep if only the cutter cuts one hair-breadth wrong!

AGAIN, is it not one reason why antique sculpture awakens a state of mind where stoicism, humanity, simplicity, seem nearer possibilities —is it not one reason that it shows us the creature in its nakedness, in such beauty and dignity as it can get through the grace of God only? There is no need among the gods for garments from silken Samarkand, for farthingales of brocade and veils of Mechlin lace like those of the wooden Madonnas of Spanish churches; no need for the ruffles and Plumes of Pascal's young beau, showing thereby the number of his valets. The same holds good of trees, water, mountains, and their representation in poetry and painting; their dignity takes no account of poverty or riches. Even the lilies of the field please us, not because they toil not neither do they spin, but because they do not require, while Solomon does, that other folk should toil and spin to make them glorious. ❧ Again, do we not prefer the books which deal with habits simpler than our own? Do we not love the Odyssey partly because of Calypso weaving in her cave, and Nausicaa washing the clothes with her maidens? Is it not an additional touch of divinity that Christianity should have arisen among peasants

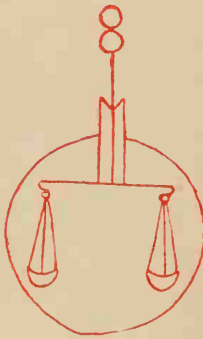
and handicraftsmen? Nay more, do we not love certain objects largely because they are useful—boats, nets, farm carts, ploughs—discovering therein a grace which actually exists, but which might else have remained unsuspected? And do we not feel in ourselves a certain lack of significance and harmony, of fullness of æsthetic quality, when we pass in our idleness among people working in the fields, masons building, or fishermen cleaning their boats and nets? Is there not in this case a diminution of æsthetic value to our detriment, due to the sense of our futility, an increase of æsthetic value to their account due to what beauty there is about them being connected with ordinary and useful things?

ND in this manner does not our æsthetic instinct strain vaguely after a double change: not merely giving affluence and leisure to others, but giving simplicity and utility to ourselves. And, even apart from this, does not all true æstheticism tend to diminish labor while increasing enjoyment, because it makes the already existing more sufficient, because it furthers the joys of the spirit, which multiply by sharing, as distinguished from the pleasures of vanity and greediness, which only diminish?

One may at first feel inclined to pooh-pooh

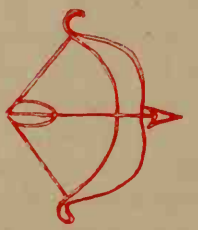
the notion that mere æstheticism can help to bring about a better distribution of the world's riches; and reasonably object that we do not feed people on images and impressions which multiply by sharing; they live on bread, and not on the idea of bread.

BUT after all, the amount of material bread—even if we extend the word to everything which is consumed for bodily necessity and comfort—which any individual can consume is really very small; the bad distribution, the shocking waste of this material bread arises from its being, so to speak, used symbolically, used as spiritual bread, as representing those ideas for which men hunger: superiority over other folk, power of having dependents, social position, ownership, and privilege of all kinds. For what are the bulk of worldly possessions to their owners: houses, parks, plate, jewels, superfluous expenditure of all kinds, and armies and navies when we come to national wastefulness? What are all these ill-distributed riches save ideas, ideas futile and ungenerous, food for the soul, but food upon which the soul grows sick and corrupt?



WOULD it not therefore be useful to reorganize this diet of ideas—to reorganize that part of life which is independent of bodily

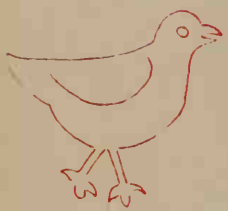
sustenance and health, which lives on spiritual commodities—the part of life including ambition, ideal, sympathy, and all that I have called ideas? Would it not be worth while to find such ideas as all people can live upon without diminishing each other's shares, instead of the ideas which each must refuse to his neighbor, and about which, therefore, all of us are bound to fight like hungry animals? Now, as I have tried to show, ideas of beauty are foremost among those which, like the miraculous loaves of the Apostles, feed thousands and leave baskets full for next day.



BUT such ideas, such impressions and preferences are, after all, one may again object, very rare—themselves an exotic, almost a luxury ❧ Quite true. Indeed, I have already remarked that they are not to be expected either from the poor in material comfort, nor from the poor in soul, since both of these are condemned, the first by physical wretchedness, the second by spiritual inactivity, to fight only for larger shares of material bread; with the difference that this material bread is eaten by the poor, and made into very ugly symbols of glory by the rich. But among those of us who are neither hungry nor vacuous, there is not, generally speaking, much attempt to make the best of our spiritual privileges. We teach our children, as we taught ourselves, to give importance only to the fact of privilege, expense, rareness, already necessarily obtruded far too much by our struggling, imperfect civilization. We are angry with little boys and girls if they inquire too audibly whether certain people are rich or certain things cost much money, as little boys and girls are apt to do in their very far from innocence; but we teach them by our example to think about such things every time we stretch a point in order to appear richer or smarter than we are; while, on the contrary, we

rarely insist upon the intrinsic qualities for which things are really valuable, but for which no trouble or money would be spent on them, but for which the difficulty of obtaining them would, as in the case of Dr. Johnson's musical performance, become identical with impossibility. I wonder how many people ever point out to a child that the water in a tank may be more wonderful and beautiful in its beryls and sapphires and agates than all the contents of all the jewelers' shops in Bond Street!

MOREOVER, we rarely struggle against the standards of fashion in our habits and arrangements; which standards, in many cases, are those of our ladies'-maids and butlers, and in most cases the standards of our less intelligent neighbors. Nay, more we sometimes actually cultivate in ourselves, we superfine and æsthetic creatures, a preference for such kinds of enjoyment as are exclusive and costly; we allow ourselves to be talked into the notion that solitary egoism, laborious self-assertion of ownership (as in the poor mad Ludwig of Bavaria) is a badge of intellectual distinction. We cherish a desire for the new-fangled and far-fetched, the something no other has had before; little



suspecting, or forgetting, that to extract more pleasure, not less, to enjoy the same things longer, and to be able to extract more enjoyment out of more things, is the sign of æsthetic vigor.

STILL, on the whole, such as can care for beautiful things and beautiful thoughts are beginning to care for them more fully, and are growing, undoubtedly, in a certain moral sensitiveness which, as I have said, is coincident with æsthetic development. This strikes me every time that I see or think about a certain priest's house on a hillside by the Mediterranean—a little house built up against the village church, and painted and roofed, like the church, a most delicate grey, against which the yellow of the 'spaliered lemons sings out in exquisite intensity. Alongside, a wall with flower-pots, and dainty muslin curtains to the windows. Such a house and the life possible in it are beginning, for many of us, to become the ideal, by whose side all luxury and worldly grandeur becomes insipid or vulgar. For such a house as this embodies the possibility of living with grace and decorum throughout by dint of loving carefulness and self-restraining simplicity. I say with grace and decorum throughout, because all things which might beget ugliness in our own

attitude toward others, would be eliminated, thrown away like the fossil which Thoreau threw away because it collected dust. Moreover, such a life as this is such as all may reasonably hope to have, may, in some more prosperous age, obtain; since it involves no hoarding of advantage for self or excluding therefrom of others. And such a life we ourselves may attain at least in the spirit, if we become strenuous and faithful lovers of the beautiful, æsthetes who recognize that their greatest pleasure, their only true possessions are in themselves; knowing the supreme value of their own soul, even as was forshadowed by the Abbott Joachim of Flora, when he said that the true monk can hold no property except his lyre.

TO use the beauties of earth as steps along which he mounts upwards, going from one to two, and from two to all fair forms and from fair forms to fair actions, and from fair actions to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is; this, my dear Socrates," said the prophetess of Mantineia, "is that life, above all others, which man should live in the contemplation of beauty absolute. Do you not see that in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the mind, he will be enabled to bring forth not images of beauty, but realities; for he has hold not of an image, but of a reality; and bringing forth and educating true virtue to become the friend of God, and be immortal, if mortal

man may?" Such are the æsthetics of Plato, put into the mouth of that mysterious Diotima, who was a wise woman in many branches of knowledge.

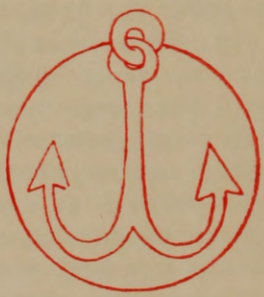
We are apt to think, and to take the words of Diotima as merely so much lovely rhetoric. But—as I have heretofore indicated—I think we are so far mistaken. I believe that, although explained in the terms of fantastic, almost mythical metaphor, the speech of Diotima contains a great truth, deposited in the heart of man by the unnoticed innumerable experiences of centuries and peoples; a truth which exists in ourselves also as an instinctive expectation, and which the advance of knowledge will confirm and explain. For in that pellucid atmosphere of the Greek mind, untroubled as yet by theoretic mists, there may have been visible the very things which our scientific instruments are enabling us to see and reconstruct piecemeal, great groupings of reality metamorphosed into Fata Morgana cities seemingly built by the gods.

THINKING about the Hermes of Olympia, and the fact that so far he is pretty well the only Greek statue which historical evidence unhesitatingly gives us as an original masterpiece, it struck me that, could one become really familiar with him, could eye and soul

learn all the fullness of his perfection, we should have the true starting-point for knowledge, in great measure, of all art ❧
Yes, and of more than art, or rather of art in more than one relation ❧
Is this a superstition, a mere myth, born of words? I think not. Surely if we could really arrive at knowing such a masterpiece, so as to feel rather than see its most intimate organic principles, and the great main reasons separating it from all inferior works and making it be itself—could we do this, we should know not merely what art is and should be, but, in a measure, what life should be and might become: what are the methods of true greatness, the sensations of true sanity. It would teach us the eternal organic strivings and tendencies of our soul, those leading in the direction of life, leading away from death.

IF THIS seems mere allegory, let us look at facts and see what art is. For is not art—inasmuch as it is untroubled by the practical difficulties of existence, inasmuch as it is free, unconscious attempt of all nations and generations to satisfy outside life, those cravings which life still leaves unsatisfied—is not art an exquisite, sensitive instrument, showing in its delicate oscillations the most intimate movements and habits of the soul? Does it not re-

veal our most recondite necessities and possibilities, by sifting and selecting, reinforcing or attenuating, among the impressions received from without; showing us thereby how we must stand towards nature and life, how we must feel and be?



AND this most particularly in those spontaneous arts which, first in the field, without need of adaptations of material or avoidance of the already done, without having to use up the rejected possibilities of previous art, or awaken yet unknown emotions, are the simple, straightforward expression, each the earliest satisfactory one in its own line, of the long unexpressed, long integrated, organic wants and wishes of great races of men: the arts, for instance, which have given us that Hermes, Titian's pictures, and Michael Angelo's and Raphael's frescoes; given us Bach, Gluck, Mozart, certain serener passages of Beethoven, music of yet reserved pathos, of braced, spring-like strength, learned, select: arts which never go beyond the universal, averaged expression of the soul's desires, because the desires themselves are sifted, limited to the imperishable and unchangeable, like the artistic methods which embody them, reduced to the essential by the long delay of utterance, the long—century long—efforts to utter

Becoming intimate with such a statue as the Olympia Hermes, and comparing the impressions received from it with the impressions both of inferior works in the same branch of art and with the impression of equally great works—pictures, buildings, musical composi-

tions—in other branches of art, becoming conversant with the difference between great art and poor art, we gradually become aware of a quality which exists in all good art and is absent in all bad art, and without whose presence those impressions summed up as beauty, dignity, grandeur, are never to be had. This peculiarity, which most people perceive and few people define—explaining it away sometimes as truth, or taking it for granted under the name of quality—this peculiarity I shall call for convenience' sake style; for I think we all admit that the absence or presence of style is what distinguishes bad art from good. Style, in this sense—and remember that it is this which connoisseurs most usually allude to as quality—style may be roughly defined as the organic correspondence between the various parts of a work of art, the functional interchange and interdependence thereof. In this sense there is style in every really living thing, for otherwise it could not live. If the muscles and limbs, nay, the viscera and tissues, did not adjust themselves to work together, if they did not in this combination establish a rhythm, a backward-forward, contraction-relaxation, taking-in-giving-out, diastole-systole in all their movements, there would be, instead of a living organism, only an inert mass. In all living things, and just in

proportion as they are really alive (for in most real things there is presumably some defect of rhythm tending to stoppage of life), there is bound to be this organic interdependence and interchange. Natural selection, the survival of such individuals and species as best work in with, and are most rhythmical to, their surroundings—natural selection sees to that.

Art and Life

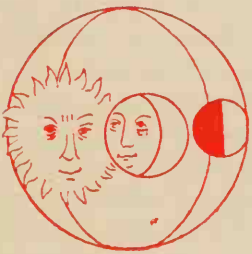
IN ART that which takes the place of natural selection is man's selection; and all forms of art which man keeps and does not send into limbo, all art which man finds suitable to his wants, rhythmical with his habits, must have the same quality of interdependence of parts, of interchange of function. But in the case of art, the organic necessity refers not to outer surroundings, but to man's feeling; in fact, man's emotion constitutes necessity towards art, as surrounding nature constitutes necessity for natural productions. Now man, accustomed to organic harmony, to congruity of action because his own existence, nay, the every cell of him, depends upon it; man, who is accustomed to style because it is only thanks to style that he exists, cannot do without congruity in the impressions he receives from art, cannot do without style. Man is one complete microcosm of interchange, of give-and-take, diastole-systole, of rhythm and harmony; and therefore all such things as

give him impressions of the reverse thereof, go against him, and in a greater or lesser degree threaten, disturb, paralyse, in a way poison or maim him. Hence he is for ever seeking such congruity, such style; and his artistic creativeness is conditioned by the desire for it. Whenever he spontaneously and truly creates artistic forms, he obeys the imperious vital instinct for congruity; nay, he seeks to eke out the insufficient harmony between himself and the things which he cannot command, the insufficient harmony between the uncontrollable parts of himself, by a harmony created on purpose in the things which he can control. To a large extent man feels himself tortured by discordant impressions coming from the world outside and the world inside him; and he seeks comfort and medicine in harmonious impressions of his own making, in his own strange inward-outward world of art ❧ This, I think, is the true explanation of that much-disputed-over ideal, which, according to definitions, is perpetually being enthroned and dethroned as the ultimate aim of all art: the ideal, the imperatively clamoured-for mysterious something, is neither conformity to an abstract idea, nor conformity to actual reality, nor conformity to the typical, nor conformity to the individual; it is, I take it, simply conformity to man's requirements, to

man's inborn and peremptory demand for greater harmony, for more perfect co-ordination and congruity in his feelings ❧ Moreover, if we become intimate with this statue, and intimate in so far with the thoughts and emotions it awakens in ourselves, we shall find that it possesses, besides this congruity within itself which assimilates it to all really living things, a further congruity, not necessarily found in real objects, but which forms the peculiarity of the work of art, a congruity with ourselves; for the great work of art is vitally connected with the habits and wants, the whole casuality and rhythm of mankind; it has been adapted thereto as the boat to the sea, as the sea itself to its rocky bed.

IN THIS manner can we learn from art the chief secret of life: the secret of action and reaction, of casual connection, of suitability of part to part, of organism, interchange, and growth ❧ All life is harmony; and all improvement in ourselves is therefore, however unconsciously, the perceiving, the realising, or the establishing of harmonies, more minute or more universal ❧ Yes, curious and unpractical as it may seem, harmonies, or, under their humbler separate names, arrangements, classifications, are the chief means for getting the most out of all things, and particularly the most

out of ourselves. For they mean, first of all, unity of means for the attaining of unity of effect, that is to say, incalculable economy of material, of time, and of effort; and secondly, unity of effect produced, that is to say, economy even greater in our power of perceiving and feeling: nothing to eliminate, nothing against whose interruptions we waste our energy, that is, our power being impressed in the progress of struggling.



Art and Life

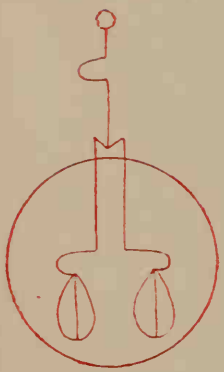
THE instinct of congruity, of subordination of part to whole, the desire for harmony which is fostered above all things by art, is one of the most precious parts of our nature, if only, obeying its own tendency to expand, we apply it to ever wider circles of being; not merely to the accessories of living, but to life itself. For this love of harmony and order leads us to seek what is most necessary in our living: a selection of the congruous, an arrangement of the mutually dependent in thoughts and feelings

Much of the work of the universe is done, no doubt, by what seems the exercise of mere random energy, by the thinking of apparently disconnected thoughts and the feeling of apparently sporadic impulses; but if the thought and the impulse remained really disconnected and sporadic, half would be lost and half would be distorted. It is one of the economical adaptations of nature that every part of us tends not merely to be congruous with itself, to eliminate the hostile, to beget the similar, but tends also to be connected with other parts; so that, action coming in contact with action, thought in contact with thought, and feeling in contact with feeling, each single one will be strengthened or neutralised by the

other. And it is the especial business of what we may call the central consciousness, the dominant thought or emotion, to bring these separate thoughts and impulses, these separate groups thereof, into more complex relations, to continue on a far vaster scale that vital contact, that trying of all things by the great trial of affinity or repulsion, of congruity or incongruity. Thus we try ourselves; and by the self-same process, by the trial of affinity and congruity, the silent forces of the universe try us, rejecting or accepting, allowing us, our thoughts, our feelings to live and be fruitful, or condemning us and them to die in barrenness ❧ Whither are we going? In what shape shall the various members of our soul proceed on their journey; which forming the van, which the rear and centre? Or shall there be neither van, nor rear, nor wedge-like forward flight? ❧

IF THIS question remains unasked or unanswered, our best qualities, our purest thoughts and purest impulses, may be hopelessly scattered into distant regions, become defiled in bad company, or, at least, barren in isolation; the universal life rejecting or annihilating them. How often do we not see this! Natures whose various parts have rambled asunder, or have come to live, like strangers in an inn, casual-

ly, promiscuously, each refusing to be his brother's keeper: instincts of kindliness at various ends, unconnected, unable to coalesce and conquer; thoughts separated from their kind, incapable of application; and, in consequence, strange superficial comradeships, shoulder-rubbings of true and false, good and evil, become indifferent to one another, incapable of looking each other in the face, careless, unblushing. Nay, worse. For lack of all word of command, of all higher control; hostile tendencies accommodating themselves to reign alternate, sharing the individual in distinct halves, till he becomes like unto that hero of Gautier's witch story, who was a pious priest one-half of the twenty-four hours and a wicked libertine the other: all power of selection, of reaction, gone in this passive endurance of conflicting tendencies, all identity gone, save that of a mere feeble outsider looking on at the alterations of intentions and lapses, of good and bad. And the soul of such a person—if, indeed, we can speak of one soul or one person where there exists no unity—becomes like a jangle of notes belonging to different tonalties, alternating and mingling in hideous confusion for lack of a clear thread of melody, a consistent system of harmony, to select, reject, and keep all things in place. ☘Melody, harmony: the two great halves of



the most purely æsthetic of all arts, symbolise, as we might expect, the two great forces of life : consecutiveness and congruity, under their different names of intention, fitness, selection, adaptation. These are what make the human soul like a conquering army, a fleet freighted with riches, a band of priests celebrating a rite And this is what art, by no paltry formula, but by the indelible teaching of habit, of requirement, and expectation, become part of our very fibre—this is what art can teach to those who will receive its highest lesson

NE thing seems certain, that the artistic activities are those which bring man into emotional communion with external Nature ; and that such emotional communion is necessary for man's thorough spiritual health. Perception of cause and effect, generalisation of law, reduces the universe indeed to what man's intellect can grasp ; but in the process of such reduction to the laws of man's thought, the universe is shorn of its very power to move man's emotion and overwhelm his soul. The abstract which we have made does not vivify us sufficiently. And the emotional communion of man with Nature is through those various faculties which we call æsthetic. It is not to

no purpose that poetry has for ever talked to us of skies and mountains and waters; we require to feel that they and ourselves are brethren united by one great law of life. And what poetry suggests in explicit words, bidding us love and be united in love to external Nature; art, in a more irresistible because more instinctive manner, forces upon our feelings, by extracting, according to its various kinds, the various vital qualities of the universe, and making them act directly upon our nerves: rhythms of all sorts, static and dynamic, in the spatial arts of painting and sculpture; in the half spatial, half temporal art of architecture; in music, which is most akin to life, because it is the art of movement and change.

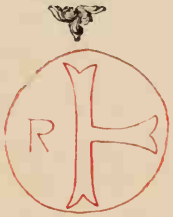
WE CAN all remember moments when we have seemed conscious, even to overwhelming, of beauty. In my own mind it has become indissolubly connected with a certain morning at Venice, listening to the organ in St. Mark's

Any old and beautiful church gives us all that is most moving and noblest, organism, beauty, the absence of all things momentary and worthless, exclusion of grossness, of brute utility and mean compromise, equality of all men before God; moreover, time, eternity, the past, and the great dead. All noble churches give us this; how much more, therefore, this one, which is noblest and most venerable! It has, like no other building, been handed over by man to Nature; Time moulding and tinting into

life this structure already so absolutely organic, so fit to live. For its curves and vaultings, its cupolas mutually supported, the weight of each carried by all; the very colour of the marbles, brown, blond, living colours, and the irregular symmetry, flowerlike, of their natural patterning, are all seemingly organic and ready for vitality. Time has added that, with the polish and dimming alternately of the marbles, the billowing of the pavement, the slanting of the columns, and last, but not least, the tarnishing of the gold and the granulating of the mosaic into an uneven surface: the gold seeming to have become alive and in a way vegetable, and to have faded and shrunk like autumn leaves.

THE morning I speak of they were singing some fugued composition, by whom I know not. How well that music suited St. Mark's! ☘ The constant interchange of vault and vault, cupola and cupola, column and column, handing on their energies one to another; the springing up of new details gathered at once into the great general balance of lines and forces; all this seemed to find its natural voice in that fugue, to express, in that continuous revolution of theme chasing, enveloping theme, its own grave emotion of life ever-

lasting: being, becoming; becoming, being. It is such an alternation as this, ceaseless, rhythmic, which constitutes the upward life of the soul: that life of which the wise woman of Mantineia told Socrates that it might be learned through faithful and strenuous search for ever widening kinds of beauty, the "life above all," in the words of Diotima, "which a man should live." The life which vibrates for ever between being better and conceiving of something better still; between satisfaction in harmony and craving therefor ❧ The life whose rhythm is that of happiness actual and happiness ideal, alternating for ever, for ever pressing one another into being, as the parts of a fugue, the dominant and the tonic. Being, becoming; becoming, being; idealising, realising; realising, idealising.



HERE THEN ENDS THE ESSAY ON ART AND LIFE BY VERNON LEE PRINTED BY ME, ELBERT HUBBARD, AT THE ROYCROFT PRINTING SHOP THAT IS IN EAST AURORA, N.Y., U.S.A. MDCCCXCVI

R